

An Interview with Ruth Zive of [Ruth Zive Copywriting](#)

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Tom: Hi everyone, this is Tom Ewer from [leavingworkbehind.com](#), and this is the first video interview I have ever done for Leaving Work Behind. In fact, it's the first interview of any kind that I've done, and so it's really fitting that I'm joined today by someone who is right at the top of the list of people that I would like to speak to with regards to their online business. This person is someone who I have followed for many months, and have a lot of interest in what they do, especially considering it's quite closely related to what I do - freelance writing. We're both in freelance writing but have different approaches, and she's been in it for longer, she has a different way of doing it and has been very successful. So with that said, I'd like to introduce you to Ruth Zive of [Ruth Zive Copywriting](#).

Ruth: Hi, how are you today?

Tom: I'm very well, thank you very much for joining us today, I really appreciate it.

Ruth: I'm thrilled to be here and the feelings are very mutual - I read your blog religiously and get a lot of inspiration from you as well. So, I'll definitely be linking to this interview and promoting your blog as I always do. So, thanks for having me.

Tom: No problem at all, it's my pleasure. I think it would be best to start, for the people who don't know about you - I have linked to you on many occasions on my blog, but I'm sure there are plenty of readers who don't know who you are and what you do - so maybe we should start with what it is that you do, a little bit about yourself and your work.

Ruth: Sure. So my business Ruth Zive Copywriting, basically provides content marketing and social media solutions, primarily to B2B businesses, that's

business to business enterprises - large companies - really across the globe. So I spend a lot of my time writing and editing, leveraging social media platforms on my clients' behalf - Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube is fast becoming a really important platform, and when I'm not doing that, usually I'm with my husband and my five children, trying to chill out a bit.

Tom: You chill out with the five children?

Ruth: Try. Try!

Tom: Okay - sounds like you've got a lot more on your plate than me, so my respect continues to grow. Alright, so let's talk a little bit about what you did before what you do now - I believe that you had a part time job - can you tell me more about that?

Ruth: Yeah, so I worked in the non-profit industry, for a variety of charities, doing mostly fundraising and marketing. And the nonprofit sector is a pretty flexible workplace, so while I was having those five children it was easier to carve out a part time arrangement. I worked in that sector for almost 12 years, I learned a lot about sales because as far as I'm concerned, fundraising is essentially sales. I did a lot of marketing and messaging. Where a value proposition in the corporate sector is what you would want to communicate, in the nonprofit sector, you're communicating a case for giving. It's the same. Different semantics really, different terminology, but the same strategy. So I learned a lot in that sector about messaging, the importance of consumer engagement, and how to solicit a gift, and I also always did a lot of writing on the side. Not just for my job - I always enjoyed writing and so I wrote a lot about my own personal life experiences for special interest publications and print magazines, so writing was always a highlight for me, no matter what job I had. And that was really my background - I did a Masters Degree in social work, with a major in community organizing, so my focus was always on community work, from a macro point of view.

Tom: It's interesting that you did do writing in some form whilst you were in your previous role. It's not something I really did myself. How do you think that prepared you for what it is that you do now - that kind of on-the-side writing?

Ruth: Well I mean it was a deliberate move for me - I knew I was always a good writer, and a lot of the feedback that I received in my career was related to my main capacity to communicate effectively, so I always knew that was a strength, and I think that the more I really got in touch with that sense of confidence and really recognized that skill, the more I wanted to be doing that full time. So, it wasn't that I had this skill and it just happened to come in handy as I launched my business - I launched my business very deliberately, knowing that it was my great skillset.

Tom: So was it a case of it being a long time coming in terms of launching your business?

Ruth: I think in retrospect, yeah I would say that. While I was in my career it wasn't like I was thinking consciously, "Gee, I would really prefer to be writing full time", or that I'd really prefer to be involved in content marketing. I didn't really know how to make that leap - it was more of a latent, subconscious desire. I knew that I loved writing, I knew I was really good at it, but I was unclear about how I would grow in my current career track to be doing that full time. It wasn't even conscious. But now in retrospect, yes - I believe that this is exactly what I am meant to be doing. I wouldn't say that I should have been doing it a long time ago, because I don't regret the years that I spent in nonprofit management, but this is where my journey was meant to take me, for sure.

Tom: That's interesting, because I think that the idea of, "I know I'm a good writer, but I'm just not sure how to leverage it into a full time business", I think that's a common concern or thought process along a lot of would-be writers, isn't it?

Ruth: Yes, for sure. That was probably my greatest obstacle.

Tom: Yeah - I think it probably is most people's. Okay - I'm interested to know what drove you to quit your job and launch your business. Now obviously you enjoy writing, so that's one aspect, but what was it that gave you the necessary drive and motivation to say, "I'm going to walk away from this secure income and throw myself into my own business"?

Ruth: I guess it was to some degree happenstance, or good fortune - the stars aligned the right way. I was working in my very comfortable and frankly well-paying nonprofit job, and at the same time my brother had launched an enterprise software company, in the tech sector. His business was scaling fast and furious, and one day his VP marketing was complaining to him that he couldn't find any good writers, and made a very weak comment that my brother could write better than most of the other people that he had encountered. My brother is not a professional writer at all - he is a good writer. My brother responded by pointing out that everyone in the family could write pretty well, so it must be genetic. So this guy asked if anyone in the family did it professionally. My brother hedged because he wanted none of us to have anything to do with his business, and eventually conceded and passed along my contact information, and I started writing for his company. So I didn't know anything about enterprise software or their business model - it was really a new language and I was somewhat insecure about it, but what I found over time was that I could write. And I was doing that on the side, the learning curve was fairly swift, and I was doing that on the side for about a year and a half. The money was good - it was a great way to supplement my nonprofit income, I was enjoying it, I was learning new things. And then my brother came to me after about a year and a half, and he was very very entrepreneurial, he'd had good success as a businessman. He came to me and said, "If you want to be doing this full time, if you want to launch your own business doing this for other companies, you have to quit your job because unless you are serious about it, and feel the desperation of not having a regular paycheck, you're not going to make it happen. You're just going to continue to be comfortable, and it will always be a side pursuit. And it struck a nerve, and I



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thought, you know, he's right. I set a date, and I stuck to it, and I quit my job, and I felt that desperation pretty quickly. But that was enough of a fire to really move me to do what I needed to do to hustle business and take it seriously. At first I thought, if I just try to wait until I have enough business as a freelancer, then I'll slowly transition, but I don't think that ever would have happened, because I never would have had the focus to grow my income to where it needed to be as a freelancer, to get to that place, it was only because I quit that I was able to devote the time and attention that was required. So that was sort of the psychology that happened - that moved me to quit my job. I think it was the best decision that I made, for sure. And there's no way I ever would have gotten to this place if I hadn't quit my job.

Tom: I think you've hit upon something which a lot of people don't realize. I think a lot of people say, when you're launching an online business, it's really difficult to have the drive and motivation to get to that point where it can be your full time endeavor, but essentially what you're saying is in order to *have* that necessary drive and motivation, I had to quit my job.

Ruth: Exactly. And it was scary - I didn't have the luxury of being able to continue on my merry way financially without my income. I needed my income. So when I say desperation - I have five children to support, and my husband has his own business that is slowly scaling, but in no way can support us without my income. So, it was desperate. I felt very very nervous and scared after quitting my job, that what if I don't make enough money, what if we can't pay the mortgage, but that was the fuel that moved me to do what I really needed to do, to get very aggressive about soliciting business. So yes, that is exactly right - it's sort of like a chicken and egg argument. I think that you have to quit your job to get where you want to be, if you're serious about it.

Tom: Yeah. This has led on to something which I think is pertinent to my audience, or at least a lot of them. I get a lot of messages from people saying, "I've got a husband or a wife to support - kids - how can I possibly take the leap when

the worst could happen and I wouldn't be able to support them?" How did you deal with that in your mind?

Ruth: So, before I quit my job, I did make sure I was having pretty steady income from one client, that being my brother's company. So, it was still just a fraction, it represented maybe 20% of the salary that I was going to be losing, maybe less than 20%. But it was a good chunk of money that I knew would probably continue to flow. And then I did secure one other contract before I quit. So before I quit, I knew that at least for the first 6 months out of the gate, I was going to have about 30% of my income intact. And that, at a minimum gave me some reassurance that we were not going to be homeless, that it would probably be enough of a threshold along with whatever else I could scramble together in those beginning months, that I would probably be okay. But I think that the key was not waiting to be in a place where I could cover 100% of the income, because I don't think that ever would have happened. My husband was very supportive. We sort of looked at our financials and figured out what we could reasonably afford and whether we could scale back, and what corners we could cut, so we prepared ourselves for the worst, but I expected that in six months, it was going to be very challenging. But it wasn't. It worked out. But we prepared for the worst, so that would be my advice.

Tom: I guess in a sense, you had the confidence that you could scale, and that's perhaps what gave you that feeling of comfort in leaving your job.

Ruth: Yeah - and the more success I had out of the gate, the more empowered I felt to solicit more business and be more bold in those pursuits, and to really take a hard look at my rates, and what I could reasonably charge, and how I could be competitive. It gave me confidence going forward, the success that I had. So I would say that you definitely should be quitting your job, but you want to be doing it responsibly. And that responsibility is different to me than it would be to you - each person has to really assess what that means to them. But ultimately, you have to quit your job to be successful as a freelancer.



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Tom: Okay - I agree completely. Now, when you quit your job, you had the contract with your brother's company, and you also mentioned that you had one other client. How did you go about finding your first few clients, and how did you cope perhaps with the - I may be putting words in your mouth - but the self-doubt or the not being sure of whether or not you can actually do this and find new clients?

Ruth: Basically, I did a lot of hustling and solicitation of business. I did a lot of prospecting and when I look back at those beginning months, 1/3rd of my time, if not more, was spent trying to secure business. I was really insecure about it - I was nervous. I remember making those phone calls and actually shaking - really doubting myself. Writing things down on a script so that I'd be ready for a conversation. But I was sneaky, I would read business magazines. A lot of my clients are in the technology sector, just because that was where I had credibility, because that was my first client. I had clippings that represented experience in that sector, so I went after companies in that sector. I would read trade publications, follow Twitter feeds, and find those companies that were scaling fast - really look for companies that were putting out corporate communications materials. Things like press releases - I would go to their website and see if they were publishing press releases more than once every week. Do they have white papers? Are they doing case studies? Then I would track down their VP marketing - I'd do a lot of Googling and sneaky searching, and I'd find their email addresses or phone numbers, and I'd cold call or send them an email pitching my services, pointing out that I'd noticed on their website that they're scaling fast and putting out a lot of materials, and I could only imagine that it's overwhelming for their marketing department, and I could make it easier by turning the work around affordably, efficiently - they wouldn't have to hold my hand. I'd point out to them the value that I could add to the business. And I had this mantra - 10 before 10, that every morning before 10am, I wanted to reach out to 10 prospects, by phone or by email. So I was sending out hundreds of emails in those beginning months. I did not go to the content mills, or Craigslist -



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I went directly to the source, because I knew that I was going to charge a premium, and I wanted people that had budgets. So I would say that one out of every ten prospects would respond and nibble, and then once they had responded, there was a good likelihood that they would hire me for at least one project. I would say, "Well why don't you just hire me for something small - a press release. It won't cost too much, and if you're pleased with my work, we can talk about other opportunities going forward." And that's what I did - I still do that. The 10 before 10 rule doesn't apply any more, and people are coming to me more than me having to solicit business, but every single client was hustled in the same way.

Tom: So I think perhaps the two main takeaways there are, you had an idea of what your ideal client was and went and found them, and then once you had found them, you really hit upon the key benefits for *them*. Rather than trying to sell *yourself*, you're essentially trying to say, "This is how it will work for you".

Ruth: I sold myself on how I could make their life easier. So, I pointed out that I worked very quickly, that I was an excellent writer, that they didn't have to hold my hand, and that this would take away from their workload, affordably. Ultimately, it is still cheaper for them to outsource to me than hire a full time content developer, internally. Even if my rates are relatively speaking high, because I don't recommend that any freelance writer charge less than \$75 per hour, and my rate is now about at \$150, I rarely have a client say, "That's too much". It's almost never that a client objects to my rate, although I don't quote by the hour, I quote by the project. Yeah - those would be the takeaways, and persistence. So I would follow up with people, usually about a week later, and say, "I don't know if you got my email, I would love to chat with you". You really have to be very persistent, and you asked about my confidence or self-doubt. I probably shouldn't use profanity on your blog but I did a lot of bull-cussing, when I was talking to my clients. I shouldn't admit that, but I had confidence in myself that I could learn what I didn't understand, and sometimes I would be frank, because I don't know about workforce management software or sales

management software, or UNIX platforms. There were concepts that I didn't understand, so I would usually be fairly forthcoming about that. I would say to my clients, "I don't have a background in technology beyond the work that I've done for my clients, but I'm a quick study, I ask a lot of questions, and I feel very confident that I can turn this around for you". And then I'd sort of, you know, exhale when I got off the phone.

Tom: So how did you cope with that initial, and possibly ongoing, depending upon the project, that lack of knowledge? I think a lot of writers say, "How can I write about these things I know nothing about? How can I represent myself as an expert, if I don't know about the topic?"

Ruth: You have to be an expert in writing, and in content marketing, and in content development. I think that if you are an expert in that, you can write about *anything*. It helps if you have familiarity with the subject matter, but I've written about things I know nothing about, and I really believe that if you're a good writer, that learning curve is usually pretty swift. So the way I would deal with that is, I was more often than not honest about that gap with my clients. I would say, going into the project, that they would have to arm me with some additional information that they can't take for granted, that I would need to understand their business model. I'm not shy about asking questions, and I'm also not shy about talking to other experts in that field that I've encountered now. So, I've been doing a lot of work lately for insurance companies, and I know very little about insurance, but everybody knows experts in the insurance sector, so I'll call up people that I'll know and ask questions, so that I can understand what I'm writing about. But I don't think that any writer should sell themselves short as an expert because they don't understand the business that they're writing in. They're experts at writing - the same way that my client is an expert in enterprise software, that doesn't make them an expert in writing. In fact, they're usually lousy writers, so we're bringing different skillsets to the table and as long as you have confidence in your skills as a writer, I don't think it matters.



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Tom: Good - okay. I'm interested in how your business has evolved since you started. We know a little bit about what you started on, and with, and the kind of work you were doing - how have things evolved since then, and how has that benefited you?

Ruth: So I started out just doing content development - just writing. That was it - no strategy, just putting words to the prospect. Slowly, it became clearer that my clients wanted social media support for a lot of the sites they were developing. And through my own blog, and my own interaction on social media, I started to feel more confident about doing that. So I started consulting with my clients along those lines, and of course that involved strategy. So now it's usually pretty rare that they'll just use straight content without some strategic component, and most of my proposals involve some strategic element - either consulting, or implementation and strategy that I help them to develop. So that's been a big change. And then going forward, I actually partnered with somebody who's an expert in web development and multimedia, and design, because what was happening was that increasingly my clients were asking me to provide all of those services as well. They didn't just want me to develop their web content, they wanted to know if I could design the site for the content I was developing. And I don't have that expertise, but I do think that a content driven marketing strategy has to be an integrated approach. A beautiful website that doesn't consider content a driver is not going to be as effective. So I was working with a colleague, and now we've decided to partner and will actually be launching under a new banner and a new brand in the coming months. Ruth Zive Copywriting will be no longer, and will be folded into this other business, which will be offering content driven, end-to-end marketing strategies for our clients. That's pretty exciting for me.

Tom: And what drives your ambition to fork out like this?

Ruth: I think it's two things. One is that I am a pretty ambitious person by nature. Money is a consideration, I've been thinking from the beginning about

how you scale as a writer. You either have to increase your rate, and I think that I'm probably close to where my rates are at a bit of a ceiling, although some people have disagreed with me. You can hire other people and outsource, and I do that a little bit, I've been outsourcing to some other writers, so that I have more hours to count. Or you can reevaluate your service offering. And so my process of growth has taken me in this direction. I really feel that I can grow to where I want to be from a fiscal point of view, an impact point of view, by offering a full suite of marketing solutions. And the other thing is that I really believe that marketing today is more so content driven than it ever has been, and so to have the kind of impact that I want to have for my clients, I have to be going in this direction.

Tom: That's an interesting statement - you're essentially saying that you have to evolve to meet your client's needs.

Ruth: The way that I want to. I mean I could continue doing just content, but then I'm really not intimately involved in the web design, or the project design, or the social media strategy. And then I don't think that the content can be as effective. So then I'm just spinning words, right? I'm just providing them with words, and they may not implement the content in the way that is most effective. So, I want to see through the process to the very end.

Tom: That's a really interesting point you've hit on then, because one of *my* key frustrations with clients is just that - you supply the words, but you know that they're not perhaps being leveraged in the best possible way, and that essentially downgrades the value of your service in a way, indirectly. And so *you're* simply looking to leapfrog that by taking control of the whole process.

Ruth: Exactly. And then hopefully I'll make lost of money.

Tom: Well, that would be good - let's be honest, that's what we all want.

Ruth: I'd be lying if I said that isn't a motivator.

Tom: Of course. Alright - I have one final question, which is along the same lines. I personally am a big fan of writing for the online community or whatever you want to call it, because of the different opportunities it can give you, and I think that you're a great example of that in terms of how you're branching out. So, for those people who perhaps feel that they can write, but are just not convinced that it's a good long term prospect, that perhaps they don't want to be writing for the rest of their lives, can you give us your thoughts on how freelance writing can eventually be so much more than freelance writing?

Ruth: I think that writing, that good writers are in short supply and high demand. So, really the opportunities are boundless, and if you're a good writer, there are so many different directions that you can take. And I think that especially with social media and blogging and content marketing strategy and Google search, content is just so much more important than it ever was. So I also love the fact that as a writer, you can really scale however you want. It's something that you can do forever - as long as your mind is intact, you can do it as much as you want, or as little as you want. You can do eBooks, or affiliate sales, or ghost writing, blogging, editorial writing - I mean it's just boundless. It's such a versatile and exciting field. You can do technical writing, manuals, guides - I mean, it's just an endless list. People would say to me, "Are you passionate about writing in the tech sector?" The answer would be no. I think you and I may have even had this conversation. I don't get excited about writing about technology - I hope my clients aren't listening. For me the excitement comes from growing my business. I definitely have the entrepreneurial spirit. But if you're considering writing as a career just because you love to write, and you don't have any real burning desire to grow your business into something bigger, then really you should write about the things you love. You should target those niche markets that align with your personal interests, and then go have a really rewarding career for as long as you like. I think it's a very wonderful, versatile, exciting field.



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Tom: It's interesting that you've essentially hit upon, in my opinion, the two ways in which you can enjoy a writing career. One is to write about things that you are really passionate about, and one is to write about things that you're not necessarily passionate about, but you leverage that time in such a way that you're making good money, and you get the buzz from *that*, from the entrepreneurial aspect of it.

Ruth: Exactly, and the beauty of writing is that you can do both. For me, the latter pursuit is the priority right now, so I'm writing to grow my business, and that's my thrill. But I still write about things that really interest me, and I still continue to do that on the side, and I'm able to fulfill that need as well. They're not necessarily mutually exclusive pursuits, but I think if you have a good handle on which is your priority, that will define the direction of your business.

Tom: Great. Now, a lot of my audience are aspiring writers or think that they would like to do it. And just freelancing in general, if we just put writing to one side, just the general act of freelancing, I think that there are a lot of parallels that you can draw, whether it's writing or something else. If you just had one piece of advice to give to the people who haven't yet made the jump, what piece of advice would that be?

Ruth: It's gonna sound completely arrogant, but I would say know that you are better than most of the people that are out there. There is a lot of mediocrity out there. I'm not suggesting that I'm the best in the business at what I do - there are better writers. I think I am really, really good - especially compared to the standard that's out there. So, believe in yourself, but more than just believe in yourself in an abstract sense, know that you are definitely better than most of the other people out there trying to do this. And if you have that sense and that confidence, I think you're likely going to succeed.

Tom: I think that's spot on. I think that, at a bare minimum, most people can make a good living from freelance blogging in any shape or form. If you get that one step above content mills, you can make an okay living. And then if you



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increase your expertise, and learn to increase your rates and attract better clients, it's essentially a hill that you can climb.

Ruth: Yes, and don't be afraid of charging what you think you're worth. That's also a really important consideration. It's much harder to increase your rates after you've set them really low, than it is to scale back your rates if you find that you're not getting the business that you want. So, think big.

Tom: Yeah. The worst thing a client can do is say no, and then you just have to go find another.

Ruth: That's right!

Tom: Alright - is there anything else at all that you'd like to add before we wrap things up?

Ruth: No, this has been great, and when my business grows Tom and I'm launching my UK office, you know who I'm calling.

Tom: Sure thing. Okay, so I want to leave everyone with the places that they need to go to find out a little more about you. Obviously there's RuthZiveCopywriting.com, and what it will become in the future as well of course. Is there is anything else that you would like to plug before we leave this?

Ruth: I encourage people to visit my blog and to subscribe and to reach out. I'm always happy to answer questions. My contact information is on my website, and that's where you can find me for now. And if you subscribe, you'll be updated on new developments and where I'll be in the coming months.

Tom: Fantastic. Well thank you very much for your time, I really appreciate it.

Ruth: Thank you so much, this has been great.

Tom: Alright, bye.

Ruth: Bye.